

Pete's Memorial to ADB

Peter Blackledge

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PM

to Me

To My Wonderful Sisters & Brother: Barbara, Patti, Penn, & Mike (Bcc) (Bcc also to other family members & friends),
I want to share special news which I learned this week about two memorials to our extraordinary & beloved father.

Background:

When I was growing up, Dad was always very supportive & encouraging; in short, he was a great Dad. Dad had been an excellent athlete, as Captain of his high school football team and as both football player & boxer at the U.S. Naval Academy. I, however, had been the skinny kid who was generally chosen last for sports teams. But Dad always encouraged me. He often referred to the two of us as The Alpha and The Omega (he the Alpha progenitor, me the Omega last progeny). And when in 8th grade I asked Dad to buy me a set of weightlifting equipment for Christmas, he did (he had successfully fooled me by putting it under the Christmas tree in the back with someone else's name on it), even though he was probably assuming that I would soon lose interest in it as I had with other gifts. But he had the faith in me to keep trying to help me find my spark & my direction. That gift turned my life around, as the gangly unathletic kid became, as Dad called me "Little Abner, just 15 1/2 year old" (after the classic muscular comic strip character drawn by Al Capp). I even managed to make my high school's basketball team and win my letter, although my basketball career was mediocre at best.

When I was later accepted at the Naval Academy, Dad suggested that I would be a perfect fit for rowing crew. I knew nothing about crew, and was concerned that I could certainly not compete on a collegiate level, particularly at a top rowing school like Naval Academy, which the year before I was to start there had won every event at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships ----- but I was determined to go hard for it. So I tried out for the crew team at USNA, & was pleasantly surprised when I made First Boat on the Freshman Heavyweight Crew Team and then again made First Boat on the Varsity Heavyweight Crew team ---- beating out many long-time oarsmen, burley ex-football players, and highly accomplished athletes from other sports. Dad was so happy & excited at my success, and became my biggest fan. When he learned that a photo taken of me rowing Varsity at the Adams Cup race (between the three top rowing powers in the country at that time: Navy, Harvard, Pennsylvania) was on the front page of the sports section of a Philadelphia newspaper, he tracked down that paper and obtained a copy of the picture (see first pic below), framed it, & put in prominently on his wall. When he learned that I would be racing in the IRA National Championships, he (at age 71) actually flew up to Syracuse, New York to

sit outside (in a rain storm) in the stands at Lake Onondaga to watch me race. And when we won my race, and I and my racing boat had our picture taken by Sports Illustrated, he tracked down that photographer, obtained a copy of that picture (see pic #3 below), framed it, and put it on his wall. He was there at the end of that race to embrace me while I was experiencing the most extraordinary euphoric high of my life.

Dad's Memorial #1: When Dad passed away in 1982, it was very hard for me. He had been my rock. So I wanted to somehow create a memorial for him. I knew that when a crew racing shell is taken out of its rack to race, the oarsmen call out the name of that shell as they lift it onto their shoulders to carry it to the water. What better memorial than to have Dad's name called out each day, at his beloved Naval Academy, in the sport which he had encouraged his youngest child to pursue? So I invited each of you wonderful siblings to join me in donating a racing shell to the Naval Academy in Dad's name, with "CAPT Allan Blackledge" on its side, and all four of you graciously joined me in that donation. The Naval Academy held a special dedication & christening ceremony for the CAPT Allan Blackledge racing shell, complete with Naval Academy officials & photographers, in which all 5 of us Blackledge siblings participated.

Over a quarter of a century later, in 2008, brother Mike & I went back to the Naval Academy, and visited the Crew House. We were amazed & so pleased to see that when the CAPT Allen Blackledge had been retired from racing, it had been permanently mounted to the top of the Navy Varsity Crew banquet hall. We were advised that it had been the racing shell which the Naval Academy varsity crew had rowed to victory again in the IRA National Championships, and it had been become a trophy & memorial in the Navy Crew House (Hubbard Hall). Three weeks ago, upon learning that the Naval Academy Crew House had undergone major renovation, I wrote the current Naval Academy Crew Coach to ask if the CAPT Allan Blackledge had survived that extensive renovation. I received his reply this evening: "There is some great history here! We still have the CAPT Allan Blackledge on the ceiling of our banquet room. It has been refurbished a bit, cleaned up and stored during the renovation...but now it is on display again." So I am pleased to report that Dad has indeed been permanently memorialized/immortalized at his beloved school.

Dad's Memorial #2: After our victory at the National Championships, there was a flurry of cameras flashing all around us. The two pictures which are my favorites are those attached below. The first (see pic #2 below) was taken by the Intercollegiate Rowing Association, and was published in their IRA National Championship racing program. It shows us holding up the shirts of the oarsmen from all the college teams that we had vanquished (a rowing tradition). The second (as mentioned above, see pic #3 below) was taken by Sports Illustrated, and it shows us after we had just thrown our coxswain (the person who steers the racing shell and calls out stroke cadence) into the water after our victory (another rowing tradition). As mentioned, Dad had tracked this second picture down & obtained it from the SI photographer whom had taken it. I always thought that picture had not made the magazine. This week, I was advised by our former varsity team captain that our picture had in fact been featured in Sports Illustrated Magazine, in a special section on Rising Young Athletes ---- and he promised to get

me a copy of that Sports Illustrated magazine. So this, in my view, is Dad's second memorial. That through his love and support, and never losing faith in me even when I deserved it least, he managed to turn a skinny kid from Texas, who previously had no particular direction, athletic ability or accomplishment, and who had never even seem a crew racing shell, into a National Champion and featured in the premier sports magazine. And so to our beloved father (and to the Blackledge Angel, of whom Dad often spoke, and who truly had to work overtime to pull this off) are these two enduring memorials dedicated. From The Omega to The Alpha, and all in between. We love you.

Love to you all, and to our father,
Peter